DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 093 837 SP 008 205

AUTHOR Toben, Carolyn M.; Sapp, Gary L.
TITLE Student-Centered Classroom Management.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Behavioral Objectives; *Behavior Change; Change Agents; *Class Management; Grade 11; Low Achievers; *Stimulus Behavior; Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a program to increase the effectiveness of English instruction with inner-city students involving the development of a systematic approach to classroom management. Implementation of the program included defining appropriate behavioral roles of teacher and students, providing positive consequences for appropriate student behaviors, maintaining accurate records of classroom behavior, and developing flexibility in managing classroom learning situations. The participants, 36 academic underachievers enrolled in two high school junior English classes, were asked to list behavior they considered inappropriate in the classroom and free time privileges they would enjoy. To decrease the high rate of inappropriate behavior, a system was established giving points for specified in-class activities that could be exchanged for 10 minutes of free time. To increase communication skills, students were asked to respond to a variety of stimuli in written and verbalized form. Independent study was used as a motivational device and teaching aid. Most students quickly began working and maintained a high level of appropriate behavior throughout the study; there was an increase in class attendance; and students were willing to complete academic tasks. The authors conclude that this study demonstrates that a single classroom teacher, through the systematic use of a student-centered behavioral management program, can produce positive changes in the behavior of a class of underachieving students. (PD)

ED 093837

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Student-Centered Classroom Management

Carolyn W. Toben
Greensboro Public Schools

Gary L. Sapp*
University of North Carolina
at Greensboro

Increasing the academic involvement of inner-city students has proven to be a particular enigma for secondary teachers. Research indicates that many of these students have long functioned in sterile, inflexible educational environments. Consequently, they have often responded with unbridled hostility or demonstrated a pervasive sense of apathy toward educational pursuits (Kardiner and Ovessey, 1962). English instructors are in a crucial position in relation to these problems. While their efforts to teach standard English composition and grammar have received social esteem, students have misinterpreted them as attempts to maintain the language and social patterns of a middle class society. Thus, the relevance of the subject matter has been questioned and the effectiveness of the teacher impaired.

One current attempt to increase the effectiveness of English instruction with inner-city students involves the development of a systematic approach to classroom management. The system is based upon some widely accepted learning principles combined with extensive student input. Implementation of the program includes: (1) defining appropriate behavioral roles of teacher and student, (2) providing positive consequences for appropriate student behavior, (3) maintaining accurate records of

*authorship is considered equal

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classroom behavior, and (4) developing flexibility in managing classroom learning situations.

The student-centered orientation emphasizes the individual worth of the student and attempts to help him develop the more positive social-emotional aspects of his behavior. Classroom organization incorporates student needs, interests, experiences, and personalization of learning activities. Students are involved in classroom planning as they work with the teacher in developing learning experiences and giving feedback throughout a teaching sequence. Classroom activities are designed to facilitate self-expression, to encourage consideration of the viewpoint of another, to increase creative acts, to develop purposeful listening for expressed emotions, and to encourage critical thinking. Concommitant emphasis is placed on increased proficiency in basic skills. The behavior management principles form the organizational structure of the program, while the student-centered aspect lends a sense of direction and purpose.

The implementation of this classroom management system was attempted in a recently integrated, predominantly black high school in a city located in the Southeast. The school is located in a black community and had been a focal point of the busing controversy. Participating subjects were 36 juniors enrolled in two English classes. The composition class was composed of academic underachievers most of whom lacked proficiency in the basic rudiments of written and oral expression. The class grade point average was a "D", and many of the students were failing in other subjects. The behavior of the class had been described by another teacher as nearly hopeless. The teacher rationalized the poor academic performance of the group by citing such factors as cultural

deprivation, excessive participation in out-of-school pursuits, use of drugs, and lack of intellectual capabilities. The humanities class was a more scholastically capable group but showed little interest in academic pursuits.

Initial observation was conducted for one week. Grouping of student behavior into gross categories indicated that inappropriate behavior was occurring at a high frequency (70-80%). Students were apparently indifferent, slept in class, talked to other students without permission, were inattentive to the teacher, and completed few of the class assignments. Absenteeism was a chronic problem with percentage of inattendance often exceeding 50%. Once the treatment program began, daily observations were conducted by the teacher and were continued for the duration of the study. Student behavior was recorded on a point chart carried on a clip board. Recordings were made while class was in progress and tabulated at the end of the class period.

In an attempt to decrease the high rate of inappropriate behavior while concommitantly motivating the students to achieve, a behavior proclamation was formulated. (Sapp and Williams, 1972). Students were given a survey sheet (see Appendix I) in which they listed (1) behavior they considered inappropriate within the classroom, and (2) free time privileges that they would enjoy. The responses of the students were then compiled, and the proclamation (see Appendix II) was developed. The class was placed upon a point system in which points were given for specified in-class activities. At the end of the class period accumulated points could be exchanged for ten minutes of free-time. During the free time the students could participate in a variety of activities. These included reading books and magazines, listening to records, participating in selected games, and talking to one's

friends without penalty. Points were tallied on a daily basis and could be accumulated toward the nine weeks grade. By utilizing such a system, it was possible to give the students continous feedback and graphically demonstrate that they could succeed on a daily basis.

The second aspect of the classroom management system was developing procedures for integrating the affective component of instruction. An initial academic goal was for students (1) to write qualitative self-referent responses to teacher presented themes, and (2) to receive positive teacher feedback as a result of their efforts. To achieve this goal students were presented with a variety of stimulus materials e.g., posters, records, pictures, newspaper ads, poems, and short stories. They were encouraged to construct written responses to these materials in any way they chose.

Initially, a variety of written responses were accepted. Gradually over a two-week period the teacher began making qualitative statements about written material and systematically praising students if their writing improved in quality. The turning point in class performance came when students were asked to respond to a picture of a Bangladesh mother and her dying child. The group became quite involved and wrote personal, moving responses to the pictures. From that point on student interest in writing appeared to markedly increase. Students were given opportunities to write poetry which could be read at designated "poetry reading" times. Many provocative poems were written and presented during these periods.

A second major instructional goal was to increase student ability to verbalize, i.e., communicate information, ideas, attitudes, and emotions effectively. To achieve this goal, instructional periods were (1) oriented about a particular theme, and (2) teaching games were employed. One successful class period was

developed about the theme of spring. Initially the students were encouraged to "brainstorm" i.e., the teacher verbalized a list of words, and students were asked to immediately respond with a relevant word or idea. In conjenction with brainstorming, poems with a similar theme were presented i.e., e.e. cummings "In Just Spring," and T. S. Eliot's "Wasteland." The poems were read and discussed and the students were encouraged to verbalize their emotions about both the joys and cruelties of spring. The terminal activity was the students drawing names of persons from a hat and verbally responding as that person would feel in spring time. This was found to be extremely effective in enabling students to express emotions in an open, relatively uninhibited manner.

Another thematic area that proved highly interesting and provocative was "marriage styles". Introductory activities included the reading of Marlowe's "Come Live with Me and Be My Love" and Raleigh's "Nymph's Reply". Next a contemporary ballad "The Wedding Song" was played and discussed in contrast to the two sixteenth century poems. Other activities, which were continued for two class days included a reading and discussion of new marriage styles (Life Magazine, April 28, 1972), and a question-answer period. During this period, relevant questions were formulated and placed in a hat. Students then selected questions out of the hat and verbalized about them e.g., one interesting question was, what if you and your boyfriend are seriously considering marriage, but one night he mentions that he definitely considers kids and the home "woman's work?" Needless to say, much discussion ensued.

High student interest was maintained by an activity entitled the "Hi IQ Bowl." In this teaching game, numbered poker chips were placed in a mason jar and shaken. Each number corresponded to a student number, alphabetically numbered according to the roll, which could be randomly drawn from the jar. The student

whose number was called was required to ask a question he had developed while reading the text; the next student whose number was called was to answer the question. Successful completion of the questions and answers netted points which could be applied toward one's grade. This game was so enjoyable that it was continually effective as a reinforcing activity for some less enjoyable task. An interesting sidelight was that the teacher initially brought in candy bars for the winners (whenever teams were used). The students soon realized how expensive that was beginning to be, so they brought in bubble gum and dispensed it as a token reward.

Independent study activities were used as motivational devices and teaching aids. Students were given an independent study projects list (see Appendix III) and assigned particular days upon which they could present. The outcome was quite impressive as original musical compositions, symbolic oil paintings, a slide program, and creative poems were presented to the class. The teacher was overwhelmed by the high quality of the students' responses.

An examination of the point chart showed that most students quickly began working and maintained a high level of appropriate behavior throughout the study. Another positive benefit of the system was an increase in class attendence. The pre-experimental attendance rate was about 50%, however, as the study progressed the rate increased to above 80%. However, the most dramatic change was in individual student reactions to academic tasks. Whereas many students had previously been indifferent or complained, most were now willing to complete academic tasks. Some expressed personal satifiaction with many of the projects in which they engaged. The increase in academic performance was reflected by the rise in the class average from a "D" to a "B" level.

Student attitudes about the system were not formally surveyed, however, the students were given the opportunity to comment in writing if they so desired. All comments were positive. Some comments were "My grades are better since we started the point system," "Thanks for giving me a chance to make a "B," and "When you use the point system, it's easier to see the results of your work."

This study demonstrates that a single classroom teacher, through the systematic use of a student-centered behavioral management program, can produce positive changes in the behavior of a class of underachieving students. These results are consistent with similar programs (Sapp and Williams, 1972; Williams, et.al., 1972) which systematically organized in-class resources and student activities to produce gains in academic behavior.

A major question that dubious teachers may raise is the utility of such an approach. It is obvious that if a classroom management system is inefficient, its widespread application will be precluded. The amount of extra time expended in this study was approximately 20 minutes per class period. This time included monitoring, recording, gathering materials, and planning. There is no question but that any management system will require additional time. As to whether the level of class performance merits such an additional time investment, that question can be answered only by the concerned teacher.

One way to circumvent the problem of lack of time to monitor the system is to enlist the help of responsible students from other classes. While some discretion is needed in student selection, the authors have found such students to function well in the role of assistant to the teacher. Another possilility is to have students check their own work with periodic spot checks by the teacher (McLaughlin and Malsby, 1972.)

Another important consideration is the issue of classroom freedom versus control. Many teachers are loathe to impose any sort of structure for fear of stifling student creative impulses. The authors have observed that for inner-city students it is important to develop a classroom atmosphere of stability and regularity. Once this environmental dependability is established, primary consideration may be given to the uniquely human aspects of individual students. It is quite difficult for students to be concerned with expressing themselves in a sensitive manner if the classroom is either aversive or uninspiring. While some may debate as to what has primacy, sunsitivity to individual needs or appropriate classroom behavior, the informed teacher may be able to encourage both.

An ancillary benefit in the current study was the positive attitudes engendered by the program. Human relations in the classroom were very congenial. Discipline was conducted in a matter-of-fact manner with loss of points being the primary penalty for inappropriate behavior. When control is placed on the basis of (1) initial student input into the system, and (2) agreement as to the equanimity of the system, the question of discipline is not laden with emotional overtones. Private vendettas between teacher and student are avoided since everyone is subject to the same negotiated limits.

The most telling argument for a student-centered management program would appear to be its long term effects upon the students. Educational institutions are currently the object of a great deal of verbal hostility and physical attack. While some may explain this acrimony as a clash of cultures, a more parsimonious explanation might be the widespread use of aversive measures within the educational system, (Skinner, 1968). Vandalism,

refusal of taxpayers to support the schools, and anti-intellectualism may all be forms of counter-attack against the schools. If we expect current students to support schools in the future, we could do worse than develop an enhanced sense of self-worth concommitant with academic and vocational capabilities.

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Appendix I

Student Survey Sheet

Name_____

1. If you were a teacher, name four things that you would not allow your students to do.

   (1)

   (2)

   (3)

   (4)

2. If you were given some free time during your classes, name five things you would like to do.

   (1)

   (2)

   (3)

   (4)

   (5)

3. Please check the three magazines on the following list that you would most enjoy:

   a. National Geographic ( )
   b. Sports Afield ( )
   c. Ebony ( )
   d. Sports Illustrated ( )
   e. T.V. Photo Story ( )
   f. Motion Picture ( )
   g. Hot Rodding ( )
   h. Mad ( )
   i. Reader's Digest ( )
   j. Any other magazines you would enjoy _____

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

   5.

Appendix II

Dear Students:

During the next five weeks your work will be evaluated according to a plan devised by a local university. Your grades will be determined by the points you achieve as indicated below:

		Consequences
I.	**Being Prepared for Class**	
	1. Attending Class, with necessary materials (pencil, paper, journal, etc.)	Gain 5 points
	Not Attending	0 points
	Not bringing materials	Lose 1 point
II.	**Classwork**	
	1. Daily Written Assignments	Gain 1-5 points
	2. Individual Reports and/or Group Work This will include one individual 2-5 minute report each week on: (a) The book you are reading (b) A movie or TV show you have seen recently. (c) A personal experience you are willing to share. (d) A demonstration talk on any approved subject (Such as "How to Change a Tire", "How to Apply Make-up", etc.). (e) A bulletin board display.	Gain 1-5 points
	3. Tests These will be given once a week and will be unannounced. They will be graded for clarity of expression and mechanics of writing (punctuation, capitalization, etc.).	10-25 points
III.	**Negative Behavior**	
	1. Loud or constant talking	Lose 1 point
	2. Eating in class without teacher permission	Lose 1 point
	3. Causing a disturbance that interrupts	Lose up to 3 points
	4. Leaving class without permssion	Lose 2 points

You will be graded each day and may check to see exactly where you stand during your free time. A = 90-100 points; B = 80-90 points; C = 70-80 points; D = below 70 points. (A bonus of 10 points per week will be given to each student who keeps a daily journal.) This is determined by a possible 15 points a day plus a 25 point weekly test.

In addition to grades, certain privileges will be based on the points you achieve. Each day, ten minutes before the bell rings, time will be called. All those who have been working and have not lost points for negative behavior will be allowed ten minutes of free time. During this time you may:

(a) Read books, comics or magazines
(b) Play games provided
(c) Play records (quietly)
(d) Sleep
(e) Study for tests in other subjects
(f) Talk (quietly) to each other

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY:

The mystery of growing...happens only and whenever we are faithful to ourselves.

e.e.cummings

Appendix III

INDEPENDENT STUDY PROJECTS (40 POINTS)

You will be given a great deal of freedom to create your own response to Cry, the Beloved Country. Some of these might include the following:

1. A group dramatization of a portion of the book using appropriate music and any props you find necessary.

2. An individual presentation of a scene as it might be understood by several different characters in the book.

3. A painting depicting your reaction to the conflict represented in the novel.

4. A collage representing your reaction to racial injustice.

5. A psalm re-created in your own words.

6. A presentation of poetry readings which represent to you the struggles depicted in Cry, the Beloved Country.

7. A report of
   Specific racial injustices in this city supplemented by photographs or slides.

8. A research paper on conditions in South Africa today.

9. A composition comparing the system of apartheid in Africa with segregation practiced in America.

10. An original music composition taped or presented in class which represents your reaction to the book.

11. Any other idea of your own that must be approved in advance.

12. An individual service project.